

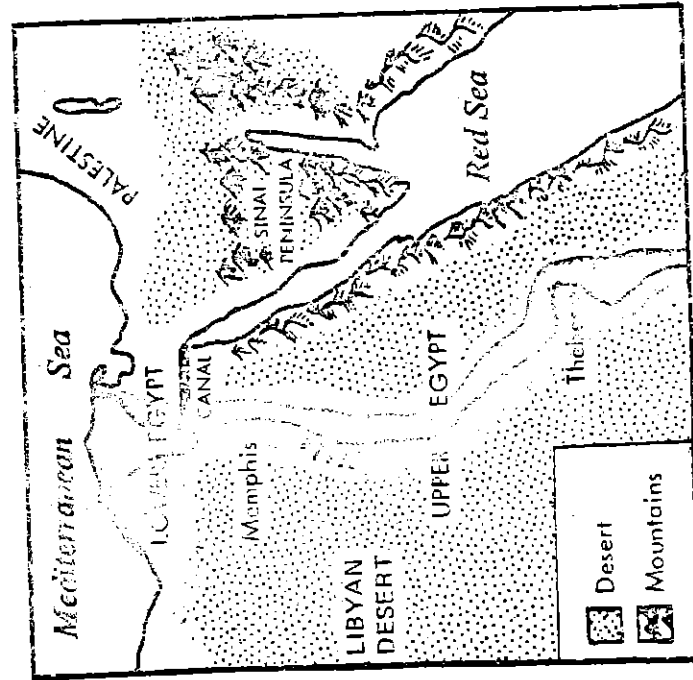
## Part 2. Ancient Egypt: Man's First Civilization

### FAVORABLE GEOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS

1. The Nile. Ancient Egypt, located in northeast Africa, was a narrow strip of land about 550 miles long. It extended 15 miles on each side of the Nile River. Each summer, the Nile overflowed. The rich soil it deposited on the adjacent fields could produce as many as four crops per year. This fertility encouraged the nomadic people of the region to settle permanently on farms.

Because the land would be a desert without Nile waters, Egypt was called "the gift of the Nile."

2. Natural Boundaries. Egypt was partially protected by natural barriers: deserts, mountains, and seas. (See the map below.) Thus shielded, the early Egyptians devoted themselves chiefly to peaceful pursuits.



Ancient Egypt: "Gift of the Nile"

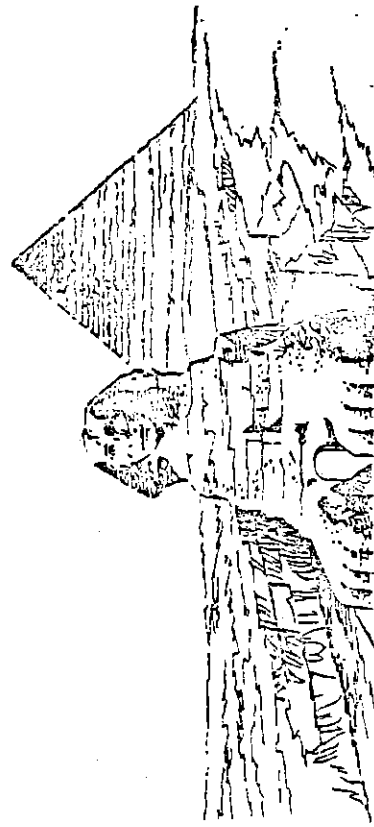
After the canal was built in 1900 B.C., the Red Sea receded, and the canal was extended southward.

### HISTORY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

1. Early Governments. Governments evolved in ancient Egypt to regulate the Nile. The people needed (a) *dikes* and *reservoirs* to control the annual flooding of the Nile Valley, and (b) *canals* to irrigate the dry farmlands. These major projects required group effort, which led to local governments, usually chiefdoms.

Through war and marriage, these chiefdoms eventually combined into two large kingdoms: (a) *Lower Egypt*, the northern part of the Nile Valley, including the river's mouth, or delta, and (b) *Upper Egypt*, the central part of the Nile Valley. About 3100 B.C., *Menes*, ruler of Upper Egypt, conquered Lower Egypt and united the country. He became the first *Pharaoh*, or King.

2. The Old Kingdom (3100-2200 B.C.). The "Old Kingdom," with its capital at *Memphis*, lasted about 1,000 years. The Pharaohs of this period erected huge stone pyramids to serve as their tombs. *Khufu* (2900 B.C.) kept 100,000 men toiling over 20 years to build the famous *Great Pyramid* at Gizeh. *Khafre* (2850 B.C.) constructed another imposing pyramid at Gizeh and also carved the *Great Sphinx*, a tremendous statue having a lion's body and a man's face.



The Sphinx and the Pyramid of Khafre at Gizeh

3. The Age of Nobles (2200-1730 B.C.). During the "Age of Nobles," the Pharaoh's power declined and that of the nobles increased. Egypt experienced disunity and civil wars. Nevertheless, some Pharaohs accomplished great engineering feats, building (a) huge irrigation projects, and (b) a ship canal that, together with the Nile, connected the Mediterranean and Red Seas.

In 1730 B.C. Egypt was almost completely conquered by invaders from western Asia, the *Hyksos*. From these fierce people, the Egyptians learned to fight on horseback and use war chariots. Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos for about 160 years.

4. The Empire (1570-1100 B.C.). A strong Egyptian leader finally drove out the Hyksos. The "Empire" that arose, with its capital at Thebes, lasted about 470 years.

During this period, ambitious Pharaohs assembled large armies and organized great war fleets. They conquered Nubia (Ethiopia) to the south, and Palestine and Syria to the northeast. They built huge stone statues of themselves as well as splendid temples. The most famous, near Thebes, is the *Temple of Karnak*.

The best-known Pharaohs of the Empire were the military leaders *Thutmose III* and *Rameses II*, and the religious reformer *Amenhotep IV* (see page 8).

About 1100 B.C. Egypt began to decline militarily. Ruled thereafter by successive foreign invaders, Egypt did not regain national independence until the 20th century A.D.

### ASPECTS OF EGYPTIAN LIFE

1. **Absolute Monarchy.** The Pharaoh was the absolute ruler, worshipped as the gods' earthly representative. He made laws, maintained courts, waged war, collected taxes, and owned all land. The Pharaoh was assisted by the (a) *nobles*, who served as local governors, tax collectors, and military commanders, and (b) *priests*, who were concerned with religious matters.

2. **Wide Class Distinctions.** The privileged aristocracy consisted of the Pharaoh, his royal family, the nobles, and the priests. These dominant classes lived luxuriously.

The unprivileged masses included (a) *freemen*, who were scribes (public writers), city merchants, and skilled craftsmen, (b) *peasants*, who worked the farms, and (c) *slaves*, the manual laborers who dug irrigation ditches and built temples. The unprivileged classes could not participate in government. While the freemen enjoyed some wealth and comforts, the peasants and slaves suffered hardship and poverty.

3. **Economic Activities.** The Egyptians depended chiefly on agriculture. They plowed the land; grew wheat, barley, and flax; and raised sheep and cattle. In the cities, they developed such industries as construction, glass-blowing, metalworking, cloth weaving, and pottery. They also engaged in foreign trade, exporting glassware, linen cloth, and clay vases; and importing ivory, spices, and copper.

To support the Pharaoh's government, the Egyptians paid heavy taxes in either labor or products.

4. **Religious Beliefs.** The Egyptians worshipped many gods. A belief in many gods is called *polytheism*. The chief gods of the Egyptians were *Re*, the sun god; *Amen*, god of Thebes; and *Osiris*, judge of the dead. The Egypt-

tians hoped for life after death. Only those who could prove they had led a good life were granted immortality by Osiris. In preparation for judgment, deceased Egyptians were entombed with the *Book of the Dead*, a collection of religious hymns, magical terms, and moral principles. The Egyptians chemically preserved (embalmed) the bodies of important persons to give the soul a permanent resting-place. A body so preserved is called a *mummy*.

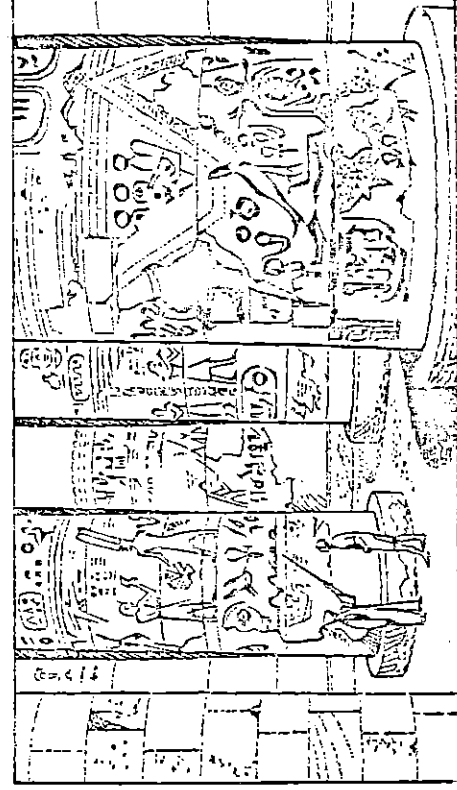
In 1375 B.C. Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, known as *Akhnaton*, introduced the worship of a single god, the new sun god *Aton*. A belief in one god is called *monotheism*. *Akhnaton* was opposed by the priests, who feared the loss of their power; and by the people, who feared the wrath of their traditional gods. After *Akhnaton's* death, the Egyptians restored polytheism.

### CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVILIZATION

1. **Architecture and Engineering.** The Egyptians excelled in working with stone (stonemasonry), and constructed gigantic pyramids and temples. These temples featured vast halls lined by massive *colonnades* (rows of columns). Egyptian engineers also built dams and irrigation canals.

2. **Art.** The Egyptians were accomplished sculptors who created huge stone statues. On the stone walls of temples and tombs, artists carved and painted domestic and historical scenes. Egyptian craftsmen skillfully designed delicate metal jewelry, elaborate wood furniture, and beautiful pottery.

3. **Hieroglyphic Writing.** The Egyptians developed one of the first systems of writing, *hieroglyphics*, meaning sacred carvings or priestly writings. Hiero-



The Temple at Karnak: Columns With Hieroglyphics

glyphics are picture symbols that represent objects, ideas, or sounds. First inscribed on stone, these symbols were later written in ink on specially prepared plant material called *papyrus* (the origin of our word "paper"). To house their papyrus scrolls, the Egyptians established the first libraries.

The key to the translation of hieroglyphics is the *Rosetta Stone*. This slab was unearthed in 1799 by one of Napoleon's soldiers. The Rosetta Stone bears the same inscription in both Egyptian hieroglyphics and Greek letters. In 1822 *Jean Champollion*, a French scholar, used his knowledge of Greek to decipher the hieroglyphics.

#### 4. Science

**a. Solar-Year Calendar.** The Egyptians, excellent astronomers, devised the first calendar that divided the year into *365 days*. It was more accurate than the *lunar* calendar, based on the revolutions of the moon around the earth. Introduced about 4200 B.C., the Egyptian solar-year calendar is the basis of the calendar we use today.

**b. Other Scientific Achievements.** The Egyptians acquired considerable knowledge of practical science. In their construction projects, Egyptian engineers calculated weight by simple arithmetical operations. They surveyed land and computed area by geometrical formulas. In preparing mummies, Egyptian embalmers used chemical processes. Egyptian healers, though relying primarily on magic, set broken bones, recognized disease symptoms, and prescribed drugs.

#### MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Select the number preceding the word or expression that best completes the statement.

1. The *least* important reason for studying history is to learn (1) to avoid mistakes made in the past (2) to distinguish fact from opinion (3) historical dates (4) how our present civilization has developed.
2. Prehistoric man had the advantage over animals in his (1) matchless strength (2) superior resistance to heat and cold (3) ability to think and to use his hands freely (4) power of communication through writing.
3. In the Old Stone Age, man knew how to (1) make fire (2) mold clay (3) use wheels (4) domesticate horses.
4. The first metal weapons were made from (1) tin (2) copper (3) iron (4) silver.
5. The beginning of the Historic Period corresponds to the beginning of the (1) Old Stone Age (2) New Stone Age (3) Copper and Bronze Age (4) Iron Age.
6. An archaeologist is a specialist in (1) building stone bridges and roads (2) painting and sculpting (3) studying habits of birds (4) studying remains of past civilizations.
7. A person living about 500 B.C. would consider his own times as (1) prehistoric (2) ancient (3) medieval (4) modern.
8. Egypt is said to be "the gift of the Nile" because the Nile (1) flows through the center of Egypt (2) overflows each spring, fertilizing the lowlands (3) provides a means of transportation (4) protected the Egyptians against invasions.